

# The Revenge of the Prushun by JOSIAH FLYNT



It was the Burlington Kid's emancipation day. Hobo custom could have held him a Prushun a year longer, but his Jocker, Whitey, had decided to give the boy his freedom. For seven long years he had slaved and toiled for his Jocker, and he was known from one end of the "Q" railroad to the other as Nebraska Whitey's youngster. When Whitey had said "Hustle, kid," he had hustled, and when Whitey had been shut up in jail for want of funds to pay his fine the boy had begged the wherewithal necessary to set him free. His official title was the one given, but by the majority of roadsters he was generally called "The Bank." He always had a little money in his pocket, and he always knew how to "throw his feet" for more, and it was this talent which earned him his nickname.

No one, except himself and Whitey, knew where he came from, but the rumor was that Whitey had "suared" him in the East when he was quite young, and that he came of much better forebears than his profession of tramp indicated. He may have been the son of some rich banker or lawyer, but it is equally possible that he originated in very humble surroundings. All that Hoboland could be sure of was that he was an exceptionally intelligent Prushun and that he and Whitey were seldom seen apart. Throughout the seven years that they had been together they had never left the "Q," and they became known to all the "professionals" who went over that road. Their "monakers" one under the other may still be seen pencilled or cut into the woodwork of watering tanks and on the doors and walls of box cars and sand houses. They were celebrities in their chosen territory, and it was sometimes thought that they would never separate. Between them they made a very strong team, and they might with profit have gone it "double-header" to this day. But Whitey was one of the old time hobos who believed that every kid should manage for himself after a certain age, and he made no exception of "The Bank." He took Hoboland seriously, just as he had formerly been dead in earnest as a thief. For him the "road" was all the world there was, and he wanted to get out of it himself, and expected others to get out of it, all that it would give. To keep a Prushun in bondage after he had acquired experience enough to take care of himself was, to his way of thinking, an act not only against the best interests of the Prushun, but against the welfare of the hobo body politic as well. So when "The Bank" reached his seventeenth year Whitey made up his mind that it was time to set him free. The boy was unusually large for his age, and this may have influenced his Jocker in coming to this decision, but he was also very expert and thoroughly hardened to the life, and it is more probable that these considerations determined Whitey to turn him loose.

As a rule, there is very little ceremony connected with a Prushun's emancipation. Either the Jocker says, "Fight your own battles now, kid," or the Prushun if he feels superior to his Jocker, says, "Burn your own chunk," and the function is over. There is no such festivity and speech making as take place in civilized society when a young man reaches his majority. Hoboland is unfriendly to persons of this kind, and the shorter the affair the better.

In "The Bank's" case, however, it was different. Whitey and he had been more like equals and pals than master and slave, and Whitey saw fit to make the emancipation the occasion for a very serious conversation. Although he was a tramp, he had taken a liking to "The Bank" such as few Prushuns ever know, and he could not let him go without a final list of instructions. He chose for the conference a hang out hidden away in some brushwood near Burlington, on the Iowa side of the Mississippi, and after the fire had been started and the railroad ties, which served as seats, had been drawn close to it he addressed the Prushun thus:—

"I've told you, kid," he began, "all that I know about noboin', an' I've pumped into you a little about what you got to be an' do if you turn thief. My advice to you is, still, don't turn thief. You've got nerve, an' you're quick an' smart, but there's ten chances to one that you won't win out, an' I don't want to see you take the risk. Course, you're your own boss now, an' can do as you like, but I wish you'd always remember what old Whitey told you. I wanted to be a thief, an' I tried to be one, but that ain't got anythin' to do with you, an', besides, I've told you that I got it in the neck. The stretches in prison used me up, an' they'll use you up, boy, if you monkey with 'em."

"Now, about noboin'. You know what it is whether it rains or shines, don't you?" and he looked at "The Bank" earnestly, but with an undisguised look of pride in his countenance, which showed plainly enough that it was he, and he alone, who had made the boy the skilled Prushun that he was.

"Yes, Whitey, I've been through it when it's rained hail stones," was the boy's reply, given with the same seriousness which characterized the query.

"That's no dream, kid, an' I know that I've been hard with you sometimes, but I had to be. You was only ten when I suared you—remember?—an' that was the only way I could teach you for a while. But I been nice with you since you got wise, ain't I?"

"I ain't got any kick comin', Whitey."

"That's real nice o' you, kid, an' it's 'cause I want to see you get there, no matter what you do. 'I'm chewin' the rag with you this way. There's some that 'ud hang on to you for a while yet, but don't you worry about goin' it alone. I'll let the bunch know 't I 'mancipated you, an' the news won't be long in goin' down the line. An' if any other bloke ever tries to snare you lick him, if you can; an' if you can't, let me hear about him, an' I'll break his neck. You're a blowed-in-the-glass hobo now, if you want to be, an' there ain't nobody that can make you a Prushun again. Nebraska Whitey says so, an' that goes; see?"

"Praps you don't want to be a blowed-in-the-glass guy; how about that?"

"I don't know what else you've been trainin' me for," "The Bank" replied, with truth.

"That's so, kid, you're right; but I was just thinkin' that you might want to reform. There's some that does, you know."

"But what would I do, if I did? I don't know any trade."

"You don't need to know a trade before you reform; it's wantin' to an' tryin' to that's the main thing."

"I don't know 't I want to."

"Well, all I can do, kid, is to tell you what I think about it. I ought to tell you 'cause I suared you, an' 'cause I'm turnin' you loose by your lonesome."

"I don't recommend nothin'; I'm too old, an' I'm too much of a bum. I always wanted to be a thief an' nothin' else, so I don't know how it feels to be reformed. If you try it, take my tip, an' go home. It'll be hard as the very devil, an' there'll come times when you'll want to be back with the gang; but if you really make up your mind to be on the level, home's the best place for you to begin. Your mother'll ask about who you been with if you go back, but I don't want you to squeal on me, kid. It wouldn't do her or you any good, an' I'd feel better thinkin' 't I was under cover. Understand, don't you?" The boy nodded his head.

"If you don't want to reform, an' feel 't you like the road for good, remember what I've always told you; make it your business, just as if you was a president of a railroad. When you get up in the mornin', know just how much dough you got on you, or planted, an' say to yourself 't you got to have so much more 'fore night comes. Don't steal, if you can possibly help it, an' don't get into more'n one sloppin' up a month. Drunks is what kills the 'boes, an' you want to be careful."

"You never told me that before," the Prushun interrupted. "That may be, but I never 'mancipated you before. I'm sendin' you off on your own uppers now, an' I'm tellin' you what I think. I don't want to see you turn out a tomato can rag. You're the fyerest kid I ever trained, an' if you stick to the road I want to hear that you done well. If you get to sloppin' up right along an' go to pieces the 'boes'll come an' tell me 't I let you have your runnin' too young, an' I don't want to hear that. I'm experimentin' with you, kid, an' I want you to make an A No. 1 stiff."

"The 'boes'll watch you more'n you think. They know who you've travelled with, an' they're next to what you ought to do."

be, an' they'll criticise you like hell for a while. The other ex-Prushuns'll keep tabs on you, too, but I wouldn't mind them much. If one of 'em looks for a scrap don't urge him on, but if he tackles you first, lay him out. You're good with your dukes, an' I ain't afraid o' your bein' licked. But in general, keep out o' rows. I've only had one since you been with me, an' that one was 'cause I was jagged."

"Don't go to jail 'less you got to. There's a class o' bums what always looks for a berth inside when the weather gets cold, but they're a done up sort. When you're on the Coast look for nothin' but money, an' in the East you needn't be afraid o' askin' for your share of it. If you throw your feet the way you have since you been with me, you won't need any jail to keep you warm."

"If you make up your mind to stick to the turf, never go home, an' don't write any letters. It's tough on your folks, but they ain't heard o' you since I suared you, an' it 'ud only stir 'em up again if you wrote. My mother ain't heard o' me since I was twelve, an' I ain't heard o' her. 'T ain't nice if you're on the level; but if you ain't, I think it's better to let 'em think that the likes o' us has croaked. You 'member Wooster Slim? Well, he went home once after ten years on the turf an' tried to reform. He couldn't make a go of it, an' sloped, an' his old mother died from thinkin' about him. He might better 'a' never seen her."

"But s'pose I get pretty close to the old home town? It'll be a terrible temptation to have a look at it," "The Bank" interjected.

"Lut you mustn't take chances o' runnin' up against the temptation," Whitey continued, looking sharply at the Prushun by way of emphasis. "This is a big country, an' you don't need to even show up where the home town is. My town is New York, an' it's a place where all 'boes like to go, but I ain't been there in ten years. I even changed my monaker from New York

three days later he failed to put in an appearance. His absences heretofore had never extended beyond twenty-four hours' duration, when he would return hungry and penitent. The police were drawn into the case, and a diligent search for the missing boy was begun. The authorities in adjacent towns and villages were notified, and a description of the boy was sent even to distant cities. A handsome reward for his safe return was also offered, and the newspapers advertised the fact far and wide.

Days went by, however, and no trace of the lost child was discovered. False rumors that he had been located were continually being received, and even the detective agency employed by the father believed for several days that it had succeeded in unravelling the mystery, but nothing definite came to light. The parents finally became convinced that it was a kidnapping affair and raised the amount of the reward, but there were others, among them the local chief of police, who were not of the opinion.

"Why don't we receive some letters from the kidnapers," the chief remarked in the barber shop, one day, "if it's then that took him? Kidnapers let people know pretty quickly what they want, and we haven't had so much as a postal card from anybody of that sort. My opinion is that the youngster's dead. I shouldn't be surprised, if the river was dragged, to hear that his body was at the bottom of it. That's the way most of the kidnappings end—I don't believe in 'em."

"But what chance have you of finding a body in a river like the Mississippi unless it happens to float?" a newspaper reporter asked, while the barber stropped his razor. "You might drag from here to New Orleans and never find what you wanted."

"Well, I ain't sayin' that he is in the river for sure," the chief explained, "but I'm willing to bet a ten dollar note even that if he's ever found, and 'I'll tell the truth, we'll see that he wasn't

The speaker was Salt Lake Lengthy, alias the Burlington Kid, and the one addressed was his quondam Jocker. The meeting place was an infrequently visited hangout near Pacific Junction, on the Missouri River. The time was a little over a year after the ex-Prushun's emancipation day. The man had changed very little, and looked just as bronzed and roadlike as when they had last been together. The ex-Prushun had developed into a full fledged hobo, and his face and manner showed it. There were still a few traces of the "kid" in his countenance, but there was also an independent look which told only too plainly that he had made use of his emancipation according to hobo customs and privileges. Whitey did not recognize him at first and for a second was at a loss to place him, but he soon remembered who the young man was.

"Why, kid," he cried at last, standing up and grasping his old Prushun's outstretched hand, "where did you blow in from? I thought you must 'a' gone home."

"I did start home, Whitey," Lengthy explained, taking a seat on a log and motioning to a boy at his side to do likewise, "but I didn't get far. I was afraid I couldn't stay."

"Is that your revenge?" and Whitey jerked his head in the direction of the young boy.

"That's my revenge, Whitey. What d'you think of him?"

"How long you had him?"

"About a year."

"Where d'you snare him?"

"Over in Southern Illinois."

"Train easy?"

"Didn't at first, but he's improvin'. Copped out a fiver for me the other day in Denver standin' in front o' swell stores."

"Bawl much?"

"Used to, but he's lettin' up now."

"Mother's boy or a guttersnipe?"



"That's my revenge, Whitey. What d'you think of him?"

to Nebraska, so't no one 'ud get next to me. That's what you got to do. You'll be an ex-Prushun after you leave me, an' you want to get a name that won't have any 'kid' attached to it, an' that won't give you or your folks away. You can't play with the business, Kid. You got to be an out-an'-outer if you're goin' to get in your graft, an' you can't be one thinkin' about home an' mother an' how to see her. That's the reason 't I want you to make up your mind for keeps whether you want to be on the level or not."

"Go off by yourself for a few days when we separate, take a good long ride on some road 't you ain't been over yet, an' think like the devil. But when your nut's once settled an' fixed don't change, an' don't be just a railroad. Pick out some road the way we did, an' study it till you know ev'ry dam tie that the rails rests on. It's the 'boes what keeps ridin' all the while that never amount to anythin'. Course, you can take a vacation once in a while, but when you're found the territory that suits you, nurse it 's if you loved it."

"Do you think I'd better stick to the 'Q'?"

"Don't stick to anythin' till you're sure 't you're goin' to be a roadster. I keep tellin' you that 'cause you're wobbly just now an' don't know where you're at. If it's a roadster 't you're bound to be, then my advice is to hunt up a fresh piece o' road. Course, I'd be glad to have you round these parts, but it might be uncomfortable for you. You're known all over the line, an' the old timers might get throwin' in your face 't you're a kid yet. If you pick out a beat o' your own, you show the bunch 't you're independent, an' ain't got to look to me for advice, see? When you get your beat, or think you know where to look for one, do what I've told you was goin' to be your reward when 'mancipation day came—look for revenge."

"Do you think I better look for it on the road 't I pick out for my beggin'?"

"No, you mustn't do that. Remember when I got you, don't you—way down East? Well, you want to get your revenge just as far from the place you settle down in. I advise you to get it as soon as you can, 'cause it looks well. If the first one 's no good try again, an' keep on tryin' till you get what you want. It may take you a good while to fix things the way you want 'em, an' praps you'll find out 't you're better without the revenge, but I'd take a full out of it once anyhow, 'cause it's your right as an ex-Prushun, an' you're expected to make use of it."

"Now, that's all I got to say, Kid, an' I want you to remember it. If you go home, forget me an' the bunch, but if you don't, hang on tight to what old Whitey did for you an' told you. I'm goin' back to the Horn, an' you better take the next train into Chi."

They returned to the watering tank, where the Jocker found a freight going West; a few minutes later the ex-Prushun boarded a cattle train bound for Chicago.

## II.

Three weeks after the emancipation of "The Bank" and the parting from his Jocker the town of —, in Southern Illinois, became very much excited one night over the disappearance of one of the young boys of the place. His father was a wealthy and prominent citizen, and the loss of the child aroused the entire community. The lad had been known to wander away from home on previous occasions, and his truancy had caused his parents not a little anxiety, but never before had he been the night time for his runaway escapades, and his father was of the belief that he had not gone off on his own initiative. Many of the townspeople also fell in with this notion when

stolen. His father's rich, all right enough, but I tell you kidnapers ain't so numerous as you think, and there's a lot of richer men to touch up besides. I don't believe the Squire is worth over a hundred thousand at the outside."

"But he'd probably spend every cent of it to get that kid back, just the same," the reporter retorted. "He's one of the kind that would do that, and if he held back at all his wife would urge him on. They think more of that kid than they do of anything else."

"Well, why in the devil didn't they watch out for him, then?" the chief pursued. "I've had to reprimand him time and again for jumping on freights, and it's a wonder to me that he wasn't killed long since."

"The trouble with you is, Chief, that you ain't got any kids o' your own," the Justice of the Peace broke in. "If it was your boy instead of the Squire's, you'd be the last one to say that he was dead until you'd done everything you could to find him. I've heard men like you talk before."

"Well, I've done all I can to find him, anyhow, and at the next meeting of the Town Council there's going to be a big expense bill to look over, too. Only yesterday I spent seven dollars in lively hire."

"What did that news amount to that come from Indianapolis—anything?"

"Oh, they had a lost boy, all right, and sent me his picture, but it wasn't the Squire's kid. That's the trouble about looking for a stray boy—you keep getting information about hundreds of others that you ain't interested in until you think every family had lost a child. If I were going to start a new business I'd go in for the absent children profit."

"You've got a good chance to try your hand right here," the reporter declared significantly, as he rose from the chair and adjusted his collar and necktie. He did not hold the local police in very high estimation.

"I've done as much as you newspaper fellows have," the chief returned sharply. "The trouble with your kind is that you think you're all born Pinkertons. If you're so smart, why don't you find the boy?"

"It isn't my job," was the laconic reply, and the reporter left the shop.

The disappearance of the boy continued to be an all absorbing topic of conversation for weeks, and the search was prosecuted with all the earnestness and skill that the Squire's money could buy, but it failed to unravel the mystery. Finally, at the chief's suggestion, the river was dragged for several miles, but nothing was found but logs, stumps and refuse from the steamboats, and the reporter wrote a squib in his newspaper to the effect "I told you so." As the weeks lengthened into months and no light was thrown on the affair, the excitement among the townspeople naturally subsided, but the Squire and his wife were inconsolable. As a last resort, in the hope that a change of scene would relieve somewhat the tension of his wife's mind and repair her shattered health, the Squire took her away and began a series of visits to seaside and mountain retreats. The detective agency was cautioned to keep the case in hand and to wire the parents immediately if any clew to the whereabouts of the boy was found. For the Squire's friends and neighbors the misfortune became an academic subject of discussion, the town being about evenly divided in its opinion. One side favored the abduction theory, while the other stuck to the notion that the boy was dead. But no one ever came to tell either side which was in the right, and the affair remained as puzzling as during the first days of the investigation.

"Hello, Whitey."

"I can't tell you. I found him ridin' a freight an' suared him. He says his governor's got boodle."

"Where you located?"

"Over in the Southern Pacific. I came up here to see you an' give you a sight o' the revenge."

While these questions were being asked and answered the old Jocker kept his trained eye on the boy at the ex-Prushun's side. He looked him over as women inspect fine silk and as men study horseflesh. It interested him to see what his former Prushun had been able to "suare."

"So you was afraid you couldn't make it go if you went home, was you?" he said in a moment, his eyes shifting from the younger boy to the ex-Prushun, and a seriousness came into his face which made it look uncommonly stern.

"Yes, Whitey; I was afraid I'd only slope again, an' you remember you told me not to do that."

"Yes, that's right," the man answered, and his eyes fell and he stared vacantly into the fire.

"Ever wanted to go home since you got your revenge?" he asked before long, continuing, however, to look at the burning wood.

"Oh, a little, but not the way I did when I first struck Chi. I'm getting over it."

There was another short pause in the conversation and all three gazed at the blaze. Suddenly Whitey looked up and broke the silence.

"Well, I'm glad to see you, kid, anyhow, an' I guess you got a good Prushun. Somehow I wish you'd gone home, but it wasn't likely 't you would, an' wishin' don't count, anyhow."

"I don't know as there's anythin' I can tell you about trainin' your kid 't you ain't next to, but he easy on him when you can be. I'm gettin' sort o' mellowlike in my old age an' don't favor lickin' kids 't I can help it. I've had three since you left me, but I didn't keep any of 'em, 'cause there was goin' to be too much thrashin' to make 'em go right. I sent 'em home, anyhow. I told 'em to go home an' showed 'em how."

"If you handle your'n right—the way I handled you—an' he's got the straight goods in him, you'll have an easy time of it down there in California. Remember what I told you about stickin' to your beat, an' make the kid understand it, too."

"If you see Frisco Fatty give him my regards. He may try to snare your kid away from you, but smack him if he does. He's a good sort, but he's a born Prushun thief."

"You know where to send your kid if he wants to go home when you 'mancipate him, don't you?"

"I know where I found him, an' where he says 't his folks live, that's all."

"Well, don't forget, when you 'mancipate him, to give him a chance to go home if he wants to. Remember 't I was square with you, an' you want to be on the level with him. He prob'ly won't want to, but it eases your conscience to give him the openin'. There comes my freight goin' East. Which way you goin'?"

"Back to the coast."

"Well, so long, kid," and he shook hands for the last time with his old Prushun. "So long, my boy," and he turned to the new Prushun. "Hope you both have good luck," and he ran for the train coming over the bridge. Five months later he lay dead in a lodging house in Omaha.

It is over ten years ago now that he emancipated the Burlington Kid, and the latter's Prushun has also reached his hobo majority. If the gossip told at hangouts in the West be true the second Prushun has found his revenge and is "holding down" a division on the Denver and Rio Grande.